

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

Media Office

Democratic Caucus

John Schorg, Director

Statehouse, Room 157

Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621

Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

March 28, 2005

REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS – It has been an active week at the Statehouse, with debate and votes on a number of crucial issues that have garnered a good deal of public attention.

Entering the final month of the 2005 session, we are moving toward several deadlines for action. By April 4, we must have completed House committee work on bills sent to us from the Indiana Senate. With more than 220 Senate bills up for consideration, we are starting to see both committee meetings and floor sessions that are stretching into the evening hours.

Certainly the most extensive debate on the House floor was on the controversial proposal to require all people to provide a photo ID in order to vote. Representatives discussed Senate Bill 18 for more than three hours before passing the measure on a party-line vote.

As I discussed in my report last week, this bill provided a solution to a problem that does not exist. Throughout the weeks of debate on this issue, supporters have not provided a single example where electoral fraud has taken place at a polling site. The problems that have occurred have been caused by absentee ballots, which are not addressed in Senate Bill 18.

It is my hope that voters are reminded before the next election of this new requirement. I simply do not want to see anyone turned away from their right to vote because they left their ID at home.

Receiving bipartisan support was Senate Bill 444, which marks the latest step in legislative efforts to stop the spread of meth across Indiana. In recent years, lawmakers have passed a series of initiatives designed to curb the production and use of this highly addictive drug. Senate Bill 444 contains many of the recommendations from the Methamphetamine Abuse Task Force, a group I have served on since its creation.

Senate Bill 444 is a comprehensive approach to the ills of meth and address the root of the problem: ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, two items found in many cold medicines that are necessary to make meth. Under this bill, both will be classified as Schedule V controlled substances, which means that products with these ingredients could only be sold at a pharmacy and distributed by a licensed pharmacist.

Those of us in southwestern Indiana know all too well that one of the problems in dealing with meth is that the drug is easy to produce. It uses many substances that can be found around the house, and it can be made practically anywhere, including homes and vehicles. Senate Bill 444 expands the list of identified chemical reagents (also known as precursors) that are used to manufacture meth, a change that reflects the growing number of substances that can be used to make the drug.

Another Meth Task Force recommendation found in SB 444 is creation of a data base cataloguing all meth labs that have been seized. Local fire and public health departments will be notified of these locations in order to be aware of potential health risks.

Since there is opposition to the Meth Bill in the Senate, the author of the Senate bill has dissented to the changes made in the House. This means that the bill will be assigned to a conference committee. Any differences that exist in the current form of the bill will have to be worked out in conference committee. Meth has become a problem all across Indiana

so it is my hope that we will address the problem at its core and help us rid ourselves of this evil drug.

House members also approved Senate Joint Resolution 7, which creates a constitutional ban on same-sex marriages in Indiana. If this measure is passed this year, it must be submitted again for consideration by the Legislature in either 2007 or 2008, then be approved by Indiana voters in a statewide referendum before becoming law.

Remember that Indiana already has what is generally acknowledged as one of the toughest state laws banning same sex marriages. IC 31-11-1-1(a) specifies that marriage in Indiana can only be between a man and a woman. The law was upheld by the Indiana Court of Appeals in January.

Finally, representatives approved Senate Bill 1, which provides a series of tax incentives for businesses, including tax credits to help businesses that relocate corporate headquarters to Indiana and extensions of benefits like tax abatements and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts.

All of us support efforts to improve economic development in our state. However, we cannot forget that if you forgive or abate the payment of taxes to one group, the "forgiveness" is made up elsewhere. My concern is that these incentives will unfairly increase the property tax bills for homeowners across Indiana. I mentioned last week Rep. Dennie Oxley's second reading amendment to provide property tax relief for homeowners and farmers by increasing the homestead deduction. Unfortunately, the House majority voted this amendment down.

It is disappointing that we were unable to assist homeowners and farmers, particularly when you consider that the House Republican budget proposes a freeze on the Property Tax Replacement Credit (PTRC), which means that it is likely that local property taxes will go up.

In closing, I want to make note of the importance of contacting members of the General Assembly. Many, many parents have contacted me concerning the proposed cuts to education funding. I agree with these concerns and believe that we are moving ourselves backwards if we cut education funding as currently proposed.

I have encouraged all of you to contact other members of the Legislature and many of you have followed through by e-mailing and writing. I was at a luncheon this past week with Sen. Luke Kenley, chairman of a Senate finance committee. In our talk, he mentioned that he had received "a letter from every parent in Mt. Vernon" about education funding. Kudos to those who have contacted legislators. Now we have to see if they are listening to our concerns!

As a final reminder, Sen. Larry Lutz and I will be at Thrall's Opera House in New Harmony this Saturday, April 2, for the Chamber's legislative forum. It starts at 9 a.m. and we look forward to discussing the session and answering your questions. The last forum in Vanderburgh County will be on April 23.

---30---

This Report can be accessed on the Internet at www.IN.gov/H76